

**Written Testimony of David D’Arcangelo, Commissioner
Massachusetts Commission for the Blind
Joint Hearing of the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means
March 26, 2019**

Good morning Vice Chair Friedman, Representative Garballey and members of the Committee. My name is David D’Arcangelo and I am the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the vital programs and highly specialized services made available to approximately 29,000 legally blind individuals of all ages in the Commonwealth and our proposed Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20) budget.

MCB seeks to ameliorate blindness by promoting independence and self-determination. The Agency’s three principal programs that we accomplish this mission are:

- **Social Rehabilitation** to further independent living (4110-1000);
- **Vocational Rehabilitation** to achieve employment (4110-3010) matching a federal grant (4110-3021)
- **Turning 22** providing residential care, case management and specialized services for **deaf/blind and multi-disabled consumers** (4110-2000).

Governor Baker’s House-1 budget is funded at \$24.6M, a 2% decrease from the FY19 GAA. This is largely attributed to the removal of earmarks to the base budget. However, the budget ensures full funding for the entire Turning 22 class membership and collective bargaining increases in FY20.

MCB continues to project an increase of consumers in both FY19 and FY20 under the agency’s Vocational Rehabilitation and Social Rehabilitation programs. The increase in the projections is attributed to aging being correlated with vision loss—meaning that the fastest growing cohort of individuals with blindness are 85 years of age and over. Also, many of our consumers seeking employment are newly blinded as adults.

Demographic Data of Individuals with a Vision Disability

Cohort	National	Massachusetts	MCB Registry
Children ages under 5	85,475	2,154	225
Age 5-17	482,727	5,764	1,211
Age 18 - 64	3,869,339	61,642	8,714
Age 65 +	3,118,010	58,163	18,680
Total	7,555,551	127,723	28,830

Source: 2017 U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS)

Please note, the ACS data uses different methods and definitions of “Visual Disability” as compared to MCB’s/MGL’s “Medical Determination” standard of 20/200. As a result, the data cannot be directly correlated and some of the individuals included in the ACS data may not be legally blind by Massachusetts standards. However, MCB endeavors to discover people with visual disabilities and encourage them to visit an eye care

provider. Currently, MCB actively serves approximately 21,100 consumers and are projecting to serve approximately 22,000 in FY19.

Also, I have embarked on a business process redesign that seeks to systematically update our Central Registry, which is the unit that processes new consumer applications from eye care providers. We currently receive applications via fax machine. Our goal is to modernize and streamline our registration system, resulting in quicker consumer flow and easier access to rehabilitation services.

In addition to the above programs and services that are funded by MCB, below are some of the Agency's innovative and notable successes over the past year:

- **New Leadership** – I was honored to join MCB on August 28, 2019. Prior to being appointed Commissioner, I served as the Director of the Massachusetts Office on Disability. I have 25+ years of experience in government including being a former Senate staffer and City Councilor-At-Large.
- **Stakeholder Engagement** – I placed a high priority on engagement with our consumers and the organizations that provide services for our consumers. This March we hosted our first “Stakeholder Engagement” meeting that brought together in one room the leaders from approximately 50 of the most major blindness organizations throughout the Commonwealth for an opportunity to receive information, enhance collaboration and base set on issues impacting our consumers.
- **Focus on Our Consumers** – Of course our primary focus is to serve MCB's 28,000 Consumers with the highest quality and comprehensive services possible. This includes a **Back to Basics Approach**, which endeavors to examine the fundamental ways with which we serve our consumers.
- **Maximizing Technology for Consumers** – MCB has always worked with the latest advances in technology that helps our consumers in their daily lives. I am interested in making the most of the latest developments, such as perhaps an Alexa pilot, to advance the independence and management of life skills.
- **VIBRANT Program** - MCB and its program partners, the Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (MABVI), Executive Office of Elder Affairs, and Massachusetts Association of Councils on Aging (MCOA) collaborated on the creation of the VIBRANT (Visually Impaired and Blind Recipients Accessing New Technology) program. VIBRANT offers free one-on-one training for individuals, especially seniors who are blind and visually impaired in regional centers in Brookline, Franklin, and Harwich.
- **Employment Now Initiative** - MCB is continuing this program that began in 2015 and continues now through our partnership with Massachusetts Eye and Ear and Cambridge Health Alliance. The Employment Now initiative is an employment and training program, which is based off the Project SEARCH model and involves internships, job placement and coaching.

- **The MCB Summer Internship Program** - This long-established program has yielded positive results through a proven job preparation model aimed at supporting blind college-age students to acquire work experience. The program is now in its 16th year and this past session involved 90 participants. This program has generated approximately 900 internship opportunities with 450 private and public business partners.
- **Job Fair** - MCB collaborates with Carroll Center for the Blind, Perkins School, National Braille Press and the Radcliff Institute for Advanced Studies at Harvard University to host the *8th Annual Job Fair for Individuals with Visual Impairments*. This annual event brings together dozens of employers and a diverse group of job seekers at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies at Harvard University. Job seekers at this job fair differ greatly in terms of experience, education, and skill-sets, but they have one thing in common – they are all visually impaired.
- **Visions of Collaborations** - MCB held a statewide conference, “Visions of Collaborations,” in June 2018 with approximately 130 professionals in attendance. At the conference, valuable information was disseminated and attendees were trained on the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to ensure that referrals are made for those individuals who need services. The conference strengthened partnerships and enhanced coordination between MCB as the VR agency, Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs), Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists, local school district Special Education as well as the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). MCB has greatly expanded pre-employment services to students in transition throughout the Commonwealth.
- **VisionWorks Consortium** – MCB has operationalized this partnership with the Carroll Center for the Blind and the Perkins School for the Blind, which coordinates the pooling of employer contacts into a centralized database to track employer engagement activities. The goal is to increase employment opportunities for individuals who are visually impaired. MCB continues to strengthen the relationship as a member of the Perkins Business Partnership which includes leading businesses in the Commonwealth.
- **White Cane Law** - MCB has led the effort to build awareness and provide information about White Cane Safety Laws. MCB hosts a White Cane Safety Day at the State House and collaborates with the Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV), which ran PSAs on electronic billboards on Routes 90, 93, 495, 24, in local RMV branches as well as mailing White Cane Law flyers in car and license registration renewal mailings.

MCB’s ongoing objective is to continue providing vital social, residential, and vocational programs, while seeking opportunities for continued innovation and efficiencies. On behalf of Governor Baker, Lt. Governor Polito and Secretary Sudders, I thank you for the opportunity to testify here today, look forward to your ongoing support and am pleased to take any questions.